



# **ON-SITE ORIENTATION AND TRAINING**

**Guidelines for Project Supervisors**

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# AmeriCorps\*VISTA

## ON-SITE ORIENTATION AND TRAINING (OSOT)

### Guidelines for Project Supervisors

#### **PURPOSE**

On-site orientation and training (OSOT) is the second step in the AmeriCorps\*VISTA member's training continuum. Its primary purpose is to build on concepts and knowledge introduced and developed at the Pre-Service Orientation. OSOT introduces the member to the sponsor, the community, and the goals and operation of the AmeriCorps\*VISTA project, and provides the member the basic knowledge and skills he or she needs to get started on the project.

The scheduling of OSOT should be timely enough to provide the member with the immediate information and skills needed to begin the job, yet flexible enough to allow members to satisfy personal and adjustment needs.

#### **SPONSOR'S RESPONSIBILITY**

- Develop an OSOT plan which is consistent with project goals and which meets minimum desired outcomes (see below).
- Submit OSOT plan to the Corporation for National Service (a.k.a, Corporation) State Program Office 30 days prior to the Pre-Service Orientation (PSO).
- Involve the member in an ongoing evaluation of activities of OSOT and adjust plans, as necessary, to meet individual member's needs.
- Evaluate OSOT and have written member and supervisory evaluations submitted to the Corporation State Program Office within five days of the completion of OSOT.
- Begin process of defining in-service training needs based on OSOT outcomes and evaluation.

#### **SCOPE OF THIS PLANNING GUIDE**

This OSOT Planning Guide is intended to help you prepare a quality OSOT plan for submission to the Corporation State Office and subsequent implementation with your new member(s). The Guide details the minimum outcomes and components required by the AmeriCorps\*VISTA program. It provides suggestions for planning and implementing your OSOT, as well as a sample list of low cost resources that should be considered in preparing and carrying out your OSOT. Finally, the Guide includes a sample OSOT plan that can be used as a reference.

Be sure to provide your new member an orientation on the basics – of your organization, the community, the project – prior to launching into skill training. The extent to which your member needs orientation and training on the basics is relative to his or her particular background. But when you consider the normally complex scope of AmeriCorps\*VISTA work plans and the importance of measuring up to the community's needs, you cannot afford to take the basics for granted. You have to be confident that you have a reasonably knowledgeable member representing the sponsor and the Corporation for National Service in the community of assignment.

Information is power. The more information the AmeriCorps\*VISTA member has, the more likely the member is able to perform the activities necessary to reach project goals and address community problems. At the same time, you do not want to overwhelm the member with facts and details, just what he or she will need to build upon.

### **Implementation Plan:**

Enlist help in planning and implementing your OSOT. Talk to, or assemble persons - other staff, neighborhood leaders, and members - for a “preliminary design” session, to brainstorm your probable On-Site Orientation and Training needs and resources. This group could decide what might be the minimum background information your member should understand to get started. You probably have identified persons who could tell your new AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, in a classroom style or in a kitchen table session, what is what in the community. If your organization or community group doesn't have this information right now, you will need to determine who can do the necessary research. Or you may determine that this "homework" – an experiential fact-finding mission - is exactly what you lay on your new recruits.

You may still have to enlist help to ask the right questions. These questions may include:

- Who runs the community?
- How do decisions get made?
- Are there political clubs or “in” groups?
- What has worked and not worked in this project or projects like it?
- How do ordinary citizens/neighbors influence decisions?
- How do we get and use key statistics to illustrate poverty-related issues such as truancy, crime, income, taxes, derelict house ownership, unemployment, and family violence?

You will certainly need to enlist help - from such individuals as your friendly local librarian, a news reporter, or an involved clergyman - to guide your members (and you) to the answers that are complete enough to be useful.

At Pre-Service Orientation, AmeriCorps\*VISTA emphasizes to attendees the importance of being able to be flexible and to deal with ambiguity, but remember that too much ambiguity is insidious. Lack of clarity depletes a member's energy and morale and can stall a project. OSOT is the time to settle false expectations that the AmeriCorps\*VISTA member may bring to their assignment. It is also the time to describe to the member your supervisory style and share your expectations of him/her.

Besides outlining tasks and time tables, you want to establish and communicate your own team “code of the member.” To do this, you must first be clear yourself on the principles, policies and requirements of AmeriCorps\*VISTA by carefully reviewing your Memorandum of Agreement with the Corporation and the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Member Handbook. In addition to laying out rules and regulations of VISTA service, the Member Handbook describes AmeriCorps\*VISTA's approach to leadership and problem-solving in low-income, disadvantaged communities, that you as supervisor will need to apply to your situation and to promote with your member.

With this as your starting point, you should carefully review with your member his or her project description and negotiate a clear understanding of any unwritten expectations. These may include what professional behavior and appearance is expected, whether special skills or interests they may bring can contribute to or distract from the work plan, what the working hours will be, and what kinds of commitments occur after standard working hours and on weekends.

### **Suggested Orientation and Training Methods:**

The methods you use for your orientation and training may include:

- Brainstorming, discussion and negotiation between you and your member or with a larger team (e.g., with other project staff).
- Interviews/discussions with key community leaders or even a random sample of residents/beneficiaries.
- Homework: Having a member review the overall written proposal which the sponsor submitted to the Corporation, the Memorandum of Agreement between the Corporation and the Sponsor, and other pertinent organization position papers.
- Field trips with strategically assigned tasks the member needs to complete.
- Having your member shadow others doing the kind of work the member will be doing.
- Attendance at staff, advisory board, and community meetings.
- Asking other staff, colleagues with other organizations and other experts to share some time reviewing their “tricks of the trade” or providing specific skill training.
- Secure free or low cost skill training from various community resources such as:
  - Community Colleges
  - Libraries
  - Community Resource and Technology Centers
  - Trade Associations
  - Community Adult Education Programs

### **Outcomes for the VISTA member from On-Site Orientation and Training:**

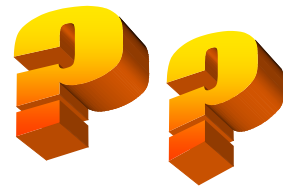
By the end of On-Site Orientation and Training, your AmeriCorps\*VISTA Member should have gained:

- *Understanding of common expectations and agreements for working relationship between VISTA and supervisor:*
  - Supervisor’s other roles and responsibilities
  - Supervisor’s management style
  - Meetings/Interactions between VISTA and supervisor
  - Clear understanding of the lines of communication between VISTA and supervisor
  - Clear understanding of the support provided to the member
  - Clear on the terms and conditions of VISTA service
  - Clear on the chain of command
- Understanding of the culture and mission of the sponsoring organization:
  - History of organization
  - Organizational mission
  - How it functions as a non-profit, municipality, state, county or federal entity
  - Its role in the community
  - Introductions to staff
- Knowledge of the bigger picture related to the VISTA project and the community:

- The VISTA project and its history
- How and where does the VISTA fit into it all
- Introduction to the community
  - The socio-economic and political structure
  - Potential resources that can be applied to achieve project goals
  - History and present status of community self-determination and problem-solving efforts
- Understanding of the organization's VISTA Policy:
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Time and attendance, duty hours
  - Annual leave
  - Sick leave
  - Mileage reimbursement policy and procedure
  - Working with the media
  - Fund raising activities
  - Evaluation of individual VISTA and of the project
  - Reporting requirements for the VISTA project
- Developing a personal work plan with the supervisor that:
  - Specifies tasks and activities for a specific period of time to accomplish the goals and objectives in the project work plan.
  - Specifies training needed for the assignment that builds upon Pre-Service Orientation, On-Site Orientation and Training, Early Service Training and Close of Service activities and the personal and professional development of the VISTA member.
- Building skills and knowledge needed to implement the member work plan:
  - Depending on the project, you may deem it necessary for the member to receive training in such areas as computer skills, public speaking, group facilitation, conflict resolution, needs assessment and asset mapping, proposal writing, negotiation and interviewing skills, etc.
  - A member may need issue area-specific training as well on such topics as domestic violence hotlines, early childhood literacy, laws regarding foster care, credit management, micro-enterprise development, etc.
  - These are just some examples of skills and training your member might need. His/her actual needs depend on the requirements of your project and the experience, skills and educational background your members already possess.



## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Why do OSOT?**

The main beneficiary of a strong OSOT plan is the AmeriCorps\*VISTA member. With the OSOT plan as a reference, the member will have an indication of what he/she can expect to be doing and what you expect to be accomplished during the orientation. You of course will establish a strong supervisory role from the outset, and can involve the member in preparing subsequent, spelled-out project work plan objectives for weekly or monthly review.

### **How long should OSOT last?**

Your On-Site Orientation and Training may last one week or it may last two, three or four, depending on the needs of the project and community on the one hand, and the needs of your member on the other. The length and content may be determined, for example, by whether you are recruiting a member from the local community or a member from another town, city or state. The length of the orientation and training may be influenced by whether you are recruiting someone with previous experience on this or similar projects. Your project may be one that requires extensive skill training and/or experiential learning (e.g., requiring your new member to spend significant time shadowing others involved in the project or conducting field interviews). A nationally recruited member may need more time finding and setting up a housing situation and getting to know the community prior to beginning skill training. All of these factors and others should be taken into consideration when you design your OSOT plan and determine how long your OSOT should last.

### **What's the timeframe for submitting an OSOT Plan?**

Your OSOT plan should be in the Corporation State Office 30 days before the start of the PSO. The State Office will review your plan for consistency with project goals, for technical quality and for its potential for meeting desired OSOT outcomes. State Office staff will discuss your plan with you prior to PSO.

### **Does a particular format have to be followed?**

This OSOT Planning Guide is offered as technical assistance. You may send to the State Office whatever format you are accustomed to use. A sample plan is attached for your reference; you may chose to use this format for your plan.

### **What else should be done prior to OSOT?**

For additional ideas about advance preparation for your member's arrival, read the "Preparing for A Member's Arrival" section of the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Supervisors Manual. This covers such topics as "Locating Housing for an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Member," "Welcoming the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Member to the Community," "Identifying Medical Practitioners," and other topics.

### **What about specific issues for locally recruited members?**

It is important that all projects receiving a member prepare and conduct an On-Site Orientation and Training, even if the member is from the community they will be serving. It has been the experience of Corporation for National Service staff based on the monitoring of such projects that even though your agency has recruited and interviewed a prospective member locally, there is still a great need for initial orientation and training.

For instance, you will need to thoroughly discuss the specifics of their AmeriCorps\*VISTA role, your agency functions, and your member's new relationship with the community. The member often will need to look at the community from an entirely new perspective and may need help on redefining his/her role in the community. These individuals may not be familiar with the politics of the community with which they may now have to engage. Finally, often locally recruited members have unique skill training needs to effectively carry out their project.

### **What about specific issues for those recruited from outside the community being served?**

The On-Site Orientation and Training for Members who are recruited from other cities and states and who need to relocate to their community of service may need very different kinds of orientation and training than locally recruited members. Keep in mind that members who are moving to significantly different environments from which they were raised and educated often experience a period of "culture shock" and stressful transition and adaptation. You can help them through this transition by following these guidelines:

- Help ensure that these members' basic needs are met before doing anything else. Helping them find housing, learn the local transportation system, and locate basic services (medical centers, dentists, supermarkets, laundromats, etc.) will provide incalculable dividends.
- Introduce them to key community groups and individuals who can support them in their transition to their new home and life.
- Give them ideas and invitations for social activities that can help them feel more "at home." You might want to host a reception and invite community leaders, board members, and program participants to meet the new addition to your organization. Or plan a day of community service activities, inviting board members and community leaders, and introduce the new member at that time. You might also submit a press release to the local media about the arrival of your new AmeriCorps\*VISTA members with some human interest information about their assignments.
- Give the new members a thorough orientation to the "culture" of the community they will be working in. The transition for the member who moves from a middle class suburb in one part of the United States to a low-income inner city neighborhood in another part of the country, or for others going from a thriving metropolis to a remote poor rural community, can be like moving to a foreign country. "Culture shock" can often be debilitating, often overwhelming.

In this area, enlist as much support from the community as possible to help the member understand the local culture, including:

- What's the "language" of the community? How do people speak to one another both personally and professionally? How do people handle bi- and multi-lingual situations. How does one most effectively use translators, if that is needed?
- What role do social events play in the community?
- What is appropriate dress in different social situations and in professional situations?
- What are the predominate religious practices and beliefs and how might they affect the community's perceptions of the member and the project?
- How are meetings conducted?
- What are peoples' perceptions and practices about time and timeliness?
- What are peoples' perceptions and practices around sexual roles, cohabitation and relationships?
- What must a member do to ensure his or her safety?
- How do things really get done? Who are the real movers and shakers and how are they accessed and involved?



# A Sample Community Organization AmeriCorps\*VISTA On-Site Orientation & Training Plan

**Note:** This is just one example of an On-Site Orientation and Training Plan. Significant detail is provided to give you an idea of the content that might be included and how activities might be carried out. The plans you submit to your Corporation State Office need not go into this much detail. Also, some plans might cover the first three weeks of a member's service – like this one – others might just be one or two weeks long. How detailed and involved your plan is will depend on the particular characteristics of your organization, project, and AmeriCorps\*VISTA member.

## WEEK ONE

### Day 1: Welcome to the Community Organization; Getting Started

#### Morning:

- Welcome new AmeriCorps\*VISTA member
- Introduce new member to the head of the organization (president/CEO/director): The head of the organization briefly discusses history/purpose of the organization, the project, and how the member fits in.
- Introduce new member to co-workers during tour of facility.
- Show new member his/her work area
- Show location of rest rooms, lunch and break rooms/space
- Member attends regular staff meeting. Take time at staff meeting to remind everyone what the member's role will be. Help the member feel welcome and part of the team.

Lunch: Have lunch with the member to make him or her feel at home.

#### Afternoon:

- Discuss basic terms of work, policies, procedures:
  - Explain hours of work and overtime policies, holidays and leave days
  - Explain organization rules about absenteeism, tardiness, process for reporting absence or illness
  - Discuss timesheets, leave usage
  - Explain the VISTA compensation process
  - Explain break policy and lunch hour (tell about restaurants in area)
  - Explain use of telephone, mail services, copier (security code), fax machine
  - Provide phone list(s)
  - Explain standards of conduct, including rules of dress, personal grooming, smoking policy, housekeeping rules, etc.
  - Explain parking practices and provide (or arrange for) office keys to building
  - Explain safety procedures
  - Explain how to order supplies
- Colleague shows the new member how to use essential equipment (telephone, computer, fax, copier).
- If the member has moved from another part of the country, spend time asking about how the transition is going and how you might help: discuss housing situation, local shopping and services, banks, medical facilities, etc. If there is time at the end of the day, give member time to take care of some of these needs – everything related to housing, bank account, phone service, post office, etc.

### Day 2:                   AM: Taking Care of Basic Needs;                               PM: Organizational Purpose and Mission and the VISTA Project

#### Morning:

- Allow the member to take the morning to take care of any additional basic needs – e.g., related to housing, bank account, phone service, post office, etc. If a staff member is available to help the VISTA member, have him/her accompany the VISTA member for assistance.

Lunch with group of office colleagues.

Afternoon:

- Discuss in more detail the mission, background, and purpose of the sponsoring organization
  - Explain history and purpose of the Organization
  - Review organization mission, goals and objectives
  - Review organization structure
  - Provide copy of organization chart and review staff duties
  - Explain departmental and divisional functions, goals, teams and team structure, major projects
- Purpose of the VISTA project
  - Explain the purpose of the VISTA project and role of the members
  - Explain goals and objectives of project
  - Review past work of project if in year 2 or 3
- Give the member time to read any materials presented to him/her.
- At the end of the day, do a ½ hour check in to answer any questions the member may have come up with about the organization or project. Tell member that tomorrow you will be going over the workplan in more detail.

**Day 3: The Member Assignment, Supervisory Relationship, and Community Investigation.**

Morning:

- Clarification of individual work plan(s), how goals will be achieved, and how the VISTA member's progress in achieving work plan objectives will be assessed
  - Review the individual workplan/job description, explain specific responsibilities
  - **Important: Make it clear what the outcomes of the project are: what permanent infrastructure will the member help create and how will that help individuals or communities move out of poverty.**
  - Explain performance reviews (date for first review, frequency thereafter)
  - Provide copy of performance standards
  - Discuss performance expectations and standards and reporting requirements
  - Discuss specific performance objectives which will be reviewed during the initial period.
- Supervisory and support structure; communications; reporting; accountability
  - Discuss the working relationship between the member and direct supervisor, mutual expectations, communications style, work style, support needs, etc.
    - Discuss and clarify communication procedures and practices
  - Review staff meeting and team meeting schedules
  - Present copy of Employee Manual and have each member sign a form to acknowledge receipt of the handbook and intention to become familiar with its contents
  - Explain steps in discipline procedure (verbal warning, written warning, etc.) and specify actions that would result in disciplinary action.
  - End on a positive affirming note about how excited you are to have the member working on this project.
- Have the member interview other staff about work styles, communications, etc.

Afternoon:

- **Independent Community Investigation:** The member spends afternoon exploring community and making a mental inventory of assets, needs and cultural practices. Brief the member before he/she heads out into the community about where to go, what to look for, and how to ensure his or her safety. Explain that the member will be reviewing his or her observations with an expert on the community the following morning.

**Day 4: Deepening the Understanding the Community and the Project.**

Morning:

- The member spends the morning with someone who is very knowledgeable about the community and discusses his or her observations from the previous day.
  - This community "expert" provides a background on the community during a more guided tour than the member's previous day's meanderings.
  - The community "expert" explains the nature of the low-income population served by the VISTA project.
  - The community "expert" introduces the member to community leaders, especially those involved in the

- VISTA project
- Discuss cultural norms, do's and don'ts, social outlets to enjoy and those to stay away from, etc.

Afternoon:

- Have the member spend the afternoon with one or more partner organizations or other members and AmeriCorps State/National members involved in this project or related projects.
- Have the member gather as much information as possible to help him/her understand the community and the project.

**Day 5: Reflection; Team Building; Celebration of the First Week.**

Morning:

- Discuss impressions and findings from Day 4 with supervisor. Discuss implications these have for the project and the member's workplan.
- Discuss potential resources that can be applied to help achieve project goals:
  - Review use of volunteers on the VISTA project
  - Meet with recruitment representatives from Volunteer Center, RSVP
  - Review barriers and successes to volunteer use of resources discussed.
  - How member can best help volunteers and others involved in the project
  - Discuss support/recognition; helping volunteers to feel valued; ways to recognize

Afternoon:

- Team Building activity with staff, other members, project collaborators, other AmeriCorps Members, etc.

Evening:

- Potluck dinner with office staff, other members, AmeriCorps members, Senior Corps members and VISTA alumni.

Celebration of the first week of the member's assignment!

**WEEK TWO**

**Day 1: Skill Development: Shadowing Staff of sponsor organization**

Morning and Afternoon:

- The member accompanies staff member for the whole day out of the office – conducting community interviews, recruiting volunteer participation in project, managing volunteers on project, etc.

**Day 2: Skill Development: Shadowing Staff of another organization involved in similar work.**

Morning and Afternoon:

- The member accompanies staff member of another organization involved in similar or complementary efforts for the whole day – conducting community interviews, recruiting volunteer participation in project, managing volunteers on project etc.

**Day 3: Reflection and Collaboration/Informational Interviews**

Morning:

- The member meets with supervisor to discuss previous days' shadow activities and to reflect on community interviews, recruiting volunteer participation in project, managing volunteers on project etc.
- Discussion of additional training the member needs to carry out assignment.

- The member begins contacting community/organizational leaders with whom the member will be collaborating on the project to set up informational interviews, beginning this afternoon.

Afternoon:

- Informational/collaboration interview 1: Discussion with Father O'Brien from the Ecumenical Outreach Program.

**Day 4: Informational/Collaboration Interviews (Continued)**

Morning:

- Informational/collaboration interview 2: Discussion with Tanika Roberts from the Community Employment Training and Services Agency.
- Informational/collaboration interview 3: Discussion with Sam Parker from the Gotham City East End Community Center.

Afternoon:

- Discussion with supervisor and other sponsor organization staff about conclusions from informational/collaboration interviews. What implications can be drawn related to the project? What recommendations and cautions do the supervisor and other staff have about those conclusions?
- The member spends the rest of the day drafting a one-month, detailed workplan – with clear and detailed activities defined.
- The member drafts a month-long plan and review with the supervisor at the end of the day.

**Day 5: Skill Development: Computer Skills**

Morning and Afternoon

- The member spends day with local Teaming for Tech computer specialist learning or refining computer skills the member will need (e.g., Microsoft Word, Excel, Publisher, Access) for producing flyers, pamphlets and posters; writing grant proposals; building or using contact databases; etc.

**WEEK THREE**

The VISTA member begins independent implementation of project with frequent check-in sessions with supervisor and other key organization staff to see how the work is going. Supervisor makes it clear to the member that this third week is still a period of learning, practice, testing, and adapting. He or she should not worry about making mistakes, asking lots of questions, and experimenting.

Additional skill training is set up for the member as needed: For example, the member could participate in a public speaking class offered by the community continuing education program; learn from an experienced staff member the key components of a quality grant proposal; or spend an afternoon with someone from the credit union to learn about the management of low-income loan programs, interest rates and starting a small business.

## Selected OSOT Resource List

**Don't know where to start? Here is a list of possible resources to get you thinking...**

### A. General information about the community and resources:

- Internet
- Libraries
- Town Welfare Offices
- Chambers of Commerce
- Newspapers
- Churches
- Trade Associations
- Medical Centers and Dentists
- Supermarkets
- Laundromats
- United Way Agencies
- Area Agencies on Aging
- Community Action Agencies
- Career Centers
- Local Businesses
- Social Workers
- Local Radio and TV stations
- Foundations
- State and Federal Government Agencies
- Other AmeriCorps projects
- Other Corporation for National Service projects:
  - National Senior Service Corps
  - AmeriCorps\*State and National
  - AmeriCorps\*National Civilian Community Corps

### B. Training and research:

- Community Colleges/Universities
- Community Resource and Technology Centers
- Community Adult Education Programs
- High Schools
- Human Resource Departments of Non-Profits and/or Businesses

### C. Selected web sites and printed materials:

- Corporation for National Service Website: [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)
- National Service Resource Center Website: [www.etr.org/nsrc](http://www.etr.org/nsrc)
- State Service Commission Web Sites
- State and County Web Sites
- Advocacy Group Web Sites
- Community Development Society website: <http://comm-dev.org/>
- The Learning institute for Nonprofit Organizations website: [www.uwex.edu/li/](http://www.uwex.edu/li/)

### D. Selected Bibliography:

- ***Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets*** by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight
- ***A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents*** by Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD)
- ***Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey*** by Michael Winder and Karen Ray

➤ ***Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Workshops***, Larry Nolan Davis and Earl McCallon

E. Some Inspiration for Working With Adults in Groups

(excerpted from *Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Workshops*.)

- *Adults are people who have a good deal of first hand experience.* Some have reflected on their experience and learned from it. Some have not. Most have learned that their powers are limited. No longer do they expect the sand fort to hold back the sea. Effective groups tap participants' experience as a major resource. Effective groups provide new experiences. Effective groups convert experience into knowledge and wisdom.
- *Adults are people who have relatively large bodies subject to the stress of gravitation.* When they were younger, many adults slept comfortably on hardwood floors. When they are older, the floor is not so comfortable. Most experience discomfort when they sit too long in hard chairs. Chairs that are too short or too narrow are even worse. Some adults fall asleep in chairs that are just right. Effective groups have effective chairs or a good many coffee breaks.
- *Adults are people who have set habits and strong tastes.* Many adults need coffee in the morning. Some need it in the afternoon. Others hate coffee and get their caffeine from cokes or tea. Some would never touch caffeine, preferring health drinks instead. Some need to smoke. Some are offended by profanity, off-color jokes, and sexual innuendo. All find learning difficult when their habits and tastes are violated. Effective groups are sensitive to adult habits and tastes and accommodate as many as possible.
- *Adults are people who have some amount of pride.* Adults like to think of themselves as independent at least some of the time. Groups can be used to subvert independence and create people who obey. Effective groups develop greater abilities in self-direction and responsibility.
- *Adults are people with very tangible things to lose.* Effective groups are concerned with building self- esteem, not tearing it down.
- *Adults are people who have developed a reflex toward authority.* Some buck it. Some bow to it. Some relate to it as a resource. And some just let it pass. Effective groups assist adults in becoming more competent. Effective groups provide a high degree of safety, mutual commitment and choice.
- *Adults are people who have developed selective stimuli filters.* People have five sensing systems. Environments contain countless stimuli. People respond to stimuli by 'filtering' those which are distressing, unpleasant, repetitious, etc. In short, most adults hear what they want to hear. Effective groups exert some control over stimuli. Effective groups focus on more than one sensing system. Effective groups penetrate the filters.
- *Adults are people who respond to reinforcements.* Most respond favorably to positive reinforcement most of the time. Some require it more often than others. Some reinforcements are insulting. Most reinforcement loses effect if frequently repeated. Effective groups are provided appropriate reinforcement.
- *Adults are people who need a vacation.* All good facilitators know this, and effective groups

accommodate it.

- *Adults are people who are supposed to appear in control and who therefore display restricted emotional response.* Many have long lost children locked up inside them. The children may be delightful or they may be horrid. Groups are often environments in which the doors come unlocked. Effective groups do not add to the bars, neither do they pry open the doors. Effective groups are prepared for emotional release if it occurs.
- *Adults are people who have strong feelings about groups.* Everybody comes from somewhere. That somewhere was either a good experience or a bad one. In it they either succeeded or failed. As a result, most people have strong tendencies toward competition, cooperation, or withdrawal. Most can develop good feelings about bad situations. Effective groups are filled with success experiences.
- *Modern adults are people who are secretly afraid of falling behind and being replaced.* Effective groups allow them to keep pace and grow with confidence.
- *Adults are people who can skip certain basics.* If they are about to build a footbridge, adults may learn only the mathematical principles required to build it. You can't force feed them something they don't want to learn or they think is irrelevant. Effective groups are not bound to basics. Effective groups get on with helping adults deal with present problems. Effective groups are concerned with finding successful solutions.
- *Adults are people who more than once found the foundations of their lives stripped away.* Leisurely afternoons are evaporated with the arrival of a newborn baby. Jobs are lost. Parents die. Ideals are tarnished. Divorces occur. Bodies don't perform as they once did. Children leave home. The stock market crashes. Responsibilities are taken away. Retirement becomes mandatory. Mates die and leave them alone. Effective groups go beyond helping adults cope; they help them learn to live again.
- *Adults are people who can learn and change.* This is the prime assumption for effective group facilitation.